

Washington, D.C. --Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) has requested that the Veterans Administration (VA) take action to ensure that construction of the VA Cemetery in Sarasota, Florida, gets back on schedule.

“This process has now fallen significantly behind schedule,” wrote Buchanan in a letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. “As a result, the families of veterans in and around Sarasota are waiting to inter their loved ones at this new VA facility.”

The phase 1B construction award was scheduled for May of 2009 with a May 2011 completion date. In June of 2009, the VA put a \$28 million Phase 1B contract out for bid. Over the next 14 months, a total of four (4) contractors were initially awarded the contract, only to subsequently be disqualified for failure to meet essential elements of the bid criterion. Recently, the VA cancelled the contract and decided to start the bidding process over anew. The VA told Buchanan they “hope” to have the contract awarded by November.

An important part of the Phase 1B contract is the construction of a columbarium with 7,000 spaces. According to Buchanan, a waiting list of veterans’ families already has more than 100 names on it.

“I understand the need to ensure that VA contracts comply with federal and VA regulations and policies, but this project is now more than a year behind schedule,” wrote Buchanan.

The Congressman asked for assurances that the Sarasota National Cemetery will be put back on-time for completion and what steps are being taken by the VA to achieve that goal.

“This is an extremely important issue for all of the veterans and their families in Southwest Florida,” wrote Buchanan.

Buchanan is a member of the House Veterans Affairs’ Committee and helped secure \$27.8 million for the construction of the cemetery. Phase 1A of the project began in June of 2008 and

the first burial was in January.